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Senate Votes to Ban Warrantless Spying

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The Senate yesterday overwhelmingly approved legislation to forbid any U.S. intelligence agency from wiretapping or using electronic surveillance on anyone in the United States without the approval of a federal court. The 95-to-1 vote sent the bill to the House.

Senate approval of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance bill came after 10 years of debate on electronic spying, exposure of the executive branch on carrying out such warrantless activities, the Watergate

scandal and the marathon Senate and House investigations of the CIA, FBI and other intelligence agencies.

The lone "nay" came from Sen. William Scott (R-Va.), who is retiring after this year.

Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which produced the bill as its first piece of legislation, said the act "will bring to an end the practice of electronic surveillance by the executive branch without a court order in the United States."

Included are such techniques as

conventional wiretaps and bugging devices, television monitoring and any advanced electronic methods.

Under the bill "targets" for electronic surveillance would have to be identified to one of a number of designated judges who would have to give approval before the operation could be carried out.

Court orders would be required for all surveillance, without exception, with strict time limits imposed according to the person or organization affected.

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